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Energy and sustainable development

Follow-up to the previous sessions of the Committee on New and Renewable Sources of Energy and on Energy for Development

Report of the Secretary-General

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I. Introduction

1. The Committee on New and Renewable Sources of Energy and on Energy for Development, at its second session, in February 1996, requested the Secretary-General to prepare a report on follow-up to the previous sessions of the Committee, for consideration by the Committee at its third session, in 1998.[1] The Economic and Social Council, at its substantive session of 1996, approved the provisional agenda and documentation for the third session of the Committee, as amended (see A/51/6 (Part II)). The present report has been prepared in response to that request.

II. Main decisions and recommendations of the Committee

2. At its first session, in February 1994, the Committee adopted a draft resolution on energy for sustainable development that underscored the linkages between energy and socio-economic development and the environment. In particular, it highlighted the linkage between energy and the objectives agreed upon in a number of forums in four main domains: development and socio-economic growth, environment, stability of market conditions conducive to economic growth, and natural resources.[2] The Committee observed that options existed for developing a new energy path through: (a) more efficient use of energy and energy-intensive materials; (b) increased use of new and renewable sources of energy; (c) more efficient production and use of fossil fuels; and (d) fuel substitution, from high-carbon to low-carbon or no-carbon fuels. It further observed that when used in environmentally sound and safe, economically viable and socially acceptable manner, the options provide a large potential for change.

3. In a draft resolution for adoption by the Economic and Social Council,[2] the Committee invited member States, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations and the private sector to take specific measures with respect to the above-mentioned options. It requested the Secretary-General and the United Nations system to adopt all the necessary ways and means to promote the development of a world energy system compatible with sustainable development, and in that context to take specific initiatives.

4. With respect to coordination of activities in energy within the United Nations system, the Committee recommended that the Secretary-General, *inter alia*, coordinate the exchange of information and experience on research, development and application of renewable technologies; improve the exchange of information on energy activities within the United Nations system; promote joint activities at the implementation stage of energy programmes within the United Nations system; improve the coordination of energy programmes within the United Nations system at the stage of programme budget formulation; make full use of the regional commissions in those coordination efforts; and promote the extension of coordination of energy activities outside the United Nations system.

5. The Economic and Social Council approved the Committee's request to convene a special session in its decision 1994/309 in order to provide advice on energy for rural development to the Commission on Sustainable Development at the Commission's third session (11-28 April 1995), when it was considering chapter 14 of Agenda 21 (Promoting sustainable agriculture and rural development), specifically concerning programme K.

6. In the report on its special session, the Committee requested the Commission on Sustainable Development to invite all States, entities within the United Nations system, other intergovernmental organizations to consider, as appropriate, a number of specific actions on a priority basis.[3]

7. The Committee, at its second session (12-23 February 1996), in draft resolution I, invited member States and entities within the United Nations system to consider convening a United Nations conference on energy for the twenty-first century in the year 2001 in order to mobilize world opinion for supporting actions at different levels on energy in relation to sustainable development. It also requested the Secretary-General to prepare a report examining the feasibility and the scope of the proposed conference, and to submit the report to the General Assembly for consideration at its fifty-second session.[1]

8. In draft resolution II,[1] the Committee requested the Secretary-General to study the possibilities of strengthening the coordination of the organizations and bodies of the United Nations in the field of energy by the Administrative Committee on Coordination. It further requested the Secretary-General, in consultation with regional commissions and other entities within the United Nations system, to study ways to enhance the capability of the system in the field of energy for sustainable development, including the possibility of establishing a dedicated institution of expanding the mandate of an existing institution in order to meet this objective.[1]

9. In draft decision I, the Committee also, 8 made a number of recommendations for action by the Council at its substantive session of 1996.[1]

III. Follow-up to the decisions of the Committee and related initiatives

10. The report of the Secretary-General on follow-up to the previous sessions of the Committee on New and Renewable Sources of Energy and on Energy for Development to the second session of the Committee (E/C.13/1996/2) outlined the follow-up to the first and special sessions of the Committee by the Council, the Commission on Sustainable Development and a number of Governments. The present section is confined to the follow-up since then.

11. The Commission on Sustainable Development at its fourth session (18 April–3 May 1996), by decision 4/15 on protection of the atmosphere and protection of the oceans and all kinds of seas, requested the Secretary-General to prepare a report for consideration by the Commission at its fifth session, in 1997, covering an inventory of ongoing energy-related programmes and activities within the United Nations system, as well as proposals for arrangements, as appropriate, that might be needed to foster the linkage between energy and sustainable development within the United Nations system.[4]

12. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization organized, in cooperation with entities within and outside the United Nations, a World Solar Summit held at Harare in September 1996. The Summit adopted the Harare Declaration on Solar Energy and Sustainable Development, and the outline of a World Solar Programme, 1996–2005, which has since been elaborated.

13. The World Bank has promoted energy sector reform and increased competition to foster greater efficiency in energy organizations and enterprises, while the Global Environment Facility is continuing to play a significant role in funding the incremental costs of projects that are related to global and environmental problems, including renewable sources of energy and energy efficiency. The principal thrust of the activities of the United Nations Development Programme in the energy area is to make energy services an instrument of socio-economic development as they impact on poverty reduction, environmental protection, generation of livelihoods and gender equality through an intensive focus on energy efficiency and renewable sources of energy.

14. The regional commissions have, by and large, shifted their activities to promote energy efficiency, the development of renewable sources of energy, and – in specific cases – improved, environmentally sound fossil fuel technologies.

15. Other entities, notably the World Meteorological Organization, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization and the United Nations Environment Programme have continued to provide assistance for capacity and institution–building in energy efficiency and energy conservation, as well as in the production of increased use of renewable sources of energy, while the International Atomic Energy Agency has, *inter alia*, provided assistance in comparative assessment of energy sources, health and environmental impacts, as well as risk of energy systems and analysis of cost of pollution abatement systems for electric power plants. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations has continued to provide assistance in the efficiency of production, transformation and use of energy, as well as the development of renewable sources of energy. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat is continuing its activities for developing and applying energy intensity/efficiency indicators, facilitating the transfer of modern technologies for increased energy efficiency providing training in energy efficient methods and techniques, development and widespread use of renewable sources of energy, as well as undertaking studies on energy efficiency and conservation and providing advisory services at the request of Governments.

16. At its substantive session of 1996, the Economic and Social Council discussed at length the recommendations of the Committee and in its resolution 1996/44 on coordination of the activities of the organizations of the United Nations system in the field of energy, requested the Secretary-General to take into account the report and views of the Committee on New and Renewable Sources of Energy and on Energy for Development when preparing the report requested in decision 4/15 of the Commission on Sustainable Development. It also requested the Secretary-General to prepare a report, taking into account, as appropriate, the views of the Committee on New and Renewable Sources of Energy and on Energy for Development, on the possibilities of strengthening the coordination of the organizations and bodies of the United Nations system in the field of energy within the framework of the Administrative Committee on Coordination and to submit the report, through the Council, to the General Assembly for consideration at its fifty-second session. The Council, furthermore, requested the Secretary-General, in consultation with the regional

commissions and other entities within the United Nations system, to address in the same report the need to enhance the capability of the system in the field of energy for sustainable development, and to explore all possible options for a high-level discussion, in this context, taking into account the results of the fifth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development and of the special session of the General Assembly in June 1997, as well as guidelines provided by the relevant environmental conventions and their respective conferences of parties, in particular, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

17. By decision 1996/303, the Council took note of the recommendations made by the Committee on New and Renewable Sources of Energy and on Energy for Development at its second session, and invited all States, entities within the United Nations system, other international organizations and non-governmental organizations to consider the recommendations, as appropriate. By its decision 1996/304, the Council took note of the report of the Committee, and approved the provisional agenda and the documentation for the third session of the Committee, as amended.

18. In response to the above-mentioned decision 4/15 of the Commission on Sustainable Development, a report of the Secretary-General entitled "Inventory of ongoing energy-related programmes and activities of entities within the United Nations system, on coordination of such activities and on arrangements needed to foster the linkage between energy and sustainable development within the system" was prepared and submitted to the Commission on Sustainable Development for consideration at its fifth session, in 1997. The Secretary-General also prepared a report on possibilities of strengthening the coordination of the organizations and bodies of the United Nations system in the field of energy within the framework of the Administrative Committee on Coordination (A/52/175-E/1997/75) for consideration by the Council and the General Assembly pursuant to the noted request by the Council.

19. The Government of Austria organized an expert workshop, attended by representatives from Governments, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, on fostering the linkage between energy and sustainable development within the international institutions, held at Vienna from 22 to 24 January 1997. The outcome of the meeting provided an invaluable input to the discussions of the fifth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development. More recently (29-30 October 1997), it organized informal consultations in connection with the preparation for the ninth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development in the year 2001, and is planning an expert meeting on renewable energy in June 1998.

20. The General Assembly, at its nineteenth special session discussed at length, *inter alia*, issues relating to energy, transport and protection of the atmosphere, and decided that there was a need for a movement towards sustainable patterns of production, distribution and use of energy, and that in order to advance this work at the intergovernmental level, the Commission on Sustainable Development would discuss energy issues at its ninth session, in the year 2001. Preparations for the session should be initiated at the seventh session of the Commission, and should utilize an open-ended intergovernmental group of experts on energy and sustainable development to be held in conjunction with intersessional meetings of the eighth and ninth sessions of the Commission. The General Assembly also stressed the need for encouraging better coordination on the issue of energy within the United Nations system. Coordination issues are discussed at length in a companion report of the Secretary-General (E/C.13/1998/7).

21. On 12 March 1997, a letter from the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs was sent to Governments eliciting information on actions that they had taken in response to the decisions of the Committee, as adopted by the Council. So far, no response has been received.

22. At its substantive session of 1997, the Council considered the report of the Secretary-General on possibilities of strengthening the coordination of the organizations and bodies of the United Nations system in the field of energy within the framework of the Administrative Committee on Coordination. Interventions emphasized the importance given to energy by the nineteenth special session of the General Assembly. Delegations agreed that discussions that will take place within the Commission on Sustainable Development leading to the ninth session of the Commission in the year 2001 constituted a suitable response to the suggestion by the Committee on New and Renewable Sources of Energy and on Energy for Development to convene a United Nations conference on energy for the twenty-first century.

23. On 4 November 1997, a letter from the Director of the Division for Sustainable Development of the United Nations Secretariat was sent to the various entities within the United Nations system, requesting information on (a) the impacts of the decisions of the Committee (at its first, second and special sessions) on the work of the respective organizations in energy and related fields, and (b) the extent to which the reports of the above-mentioned sessions of the Committee

had been useful in the work of the respective organizations and the extent to which the organization had made use of such reports. So far, no response has been received from the entities within the United Nations system.

24. A number of non-governmental organizations have been active in the field of energy and have organized a number of meetings, workshops and symposia on energy, in particular in relation to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, and are planning future meetings on energy and sustainable development. Many of the deliberations are of interest to the Committee, and have provided valuable inputs to the past sessions of the Committee, as well as other intergovernmental bodies of the United Nations system. Many such organizations have expressed an interest in working closely with the Committee and the Commission on Sustainable Development in identifying key issues in energy for consideration at the ninth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development in the year 2001.

IV. Conclusions

25. The recommendations of the Committee have direct and indirect influence on activities in energy and related areas within the United Nations system, by other intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, as well as by Member States. Many have paid increasing attention to energy efficiency, conservation and demand management and pricing policies, while others have contributed to the promotion and dissemination of clean energy technologies. Support for further introduction and application of renewable energy sources has increased substantially. Activities in the area of capacity-building and institutional development are increasingly linked to the broader context of socio-economic or environmental planning.

26. As can be seen from the discussion in section III above, other intergovernmental bodies of the United Nations system, namely, the Economic and Social Council, the Commission on Sustainable Development and the General Assembly, have discussed in depth the issues adhered to by the Committee and made recommendations consistent with those of the Committee to Member States, entities within the United Nations system, and other organizations, for action, as appropriate.

Notes

[1] See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1996, Supplement No. 4* (E/1996/24).

[2] *Ibid., 1994, Supplement No. 5* (E/1994/25 and Corr.1).

[3] *Ibid., 1995, Supplement No. 5* (E/1995/25/Rev.1).

[4] *Ibid., 1996, Supplement No. 8* (E/1996/28).